

CHAPTER ONE

Beyond Uncertainty

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1)

The chapter begins with the statement, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” The Greek word for faith used here is *pistis* (“strong belief,” “persuasion,” “conviction”) but it seems to reflect the Hebraic idea of *emun* or *emunah* (from Heb. *aman* meaning “to build up or support”; *emeth*, “truth”, is another derivative of it). This *pistis* (*emun*) is not just undeniably related to the truth (*emeth*) of God but is also the ground and support (*aman*) of all spiritual experiences, as we will see shortly. Obviously, what the writer here has in mind is true faith in God and His revelation. It is not blind faith or herd-mentality faith.⁹ Faith in God is of ultimate kind and is, therefore, both unique and absolute. Since it is not concerned with contingent things of this world it is also not like the belief in the contingent things of the world. Further, belief in God is foundational to our common-sense assumptions about this world as both moral and rational. Anyone who denies God must also deny the existence of absolute morals and absolute truth, for both lose their foundation if their foundation is found within this world itself. It would be like trying to place a ball on that ball itself. Without an unchangeable transcendent ground, there can be no absolute point of reference (as in outer space where all bodies hang in positions relative to each other). The unchanging nature and character of God is the foundation of true morality¹⁰ and His veracity is the foundation of all

⁹ Socrates said that “the life which is unexamined is not worth living.” Plato, *The Republic and Other Works*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), p. 466.

¹⁰ This is not the same as saying that the difference between right and wrong is due to God’s fiat, a thesis that Bertrand Russell tried to rebut (Richter & Fogg, *Philosophy Looks to the Future*, p. 382). It means to say that moral goodness is

reasonability and truth. Therefore, divine existence is the surest fact of reality as the psalmist also says that it is only the fool who says in his heart that there is no God (Ps. 14:1). Since God is the final cause, ground, and reason of this universe and all human experience, faith in God is also final and ultimate. It is this reason why God can accept no excuse for unbelief from the unbeliever. For the faith of God (Mk. 11:22)¹¹ is both distinctive and final; it is the ground of the ultimate form of experience which is divinely given.

BETWEEN NOW AND ETERNITY

In the Greek (in which the New Testament was written), the order of words gives emphasis to “things hoped for”.¹² These “things” are firstly, “hoped for”, but also “not seen” as Paul clearly explains it to the Romans that “hope that is seen is not hope: for who hopeth for that which he seeth?” (Rom. 8:24, ASV).

Hope is defined as “expectation and desire”;¹³ thus, “to hope” signifies wanting something to happen and believing in its possibility. Thus believing and hoping are connected as the now to the future. We believe in the present what we hope about the future; the future being invisible at the present. The future possesses the goal and meaning that integrates our present life and gives us a reason to move forward. Thus, faith is that which binds history together with meaning. One tends to look at history as general and particular. General history deals with the history of the world: its origin (also including the origin of time), its progress, and its destiny. Here, we are not just talking about History as a study-

ultimately based on the eternally unchanging character of God and everything that is morally good is in so far as it conforms to God’s character. For instance, falsehood is evil because God cannot lie and there is no falsehood in Him: not just because He has commanded us not to lie. In such case, we do not say that God is above good and evil but that God is the embodiment and reality of ultimate goodness; evil is His opposite and therefore against Him.

¹¹ The Greek word *θεου* used here means ‘of God’.

¹² Ἦστί δὲ πίστις ἐλπίζομένων ὑπόστασις. Observe that ἐλπίζομένων (of things hoped for) precedes ὑπόστασις (substance). Greek grammar discerns subject and predicate by the endings of words and not their placement in the sentence. The placement often intends emphasis on the word placed first.

¹³ *The Little Oxford Dictionary*, rev. 7th edn. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).